

Learning & Leading Gap Year Scholars

● Lynn Munro

Dates	August 2009 – May 2010
Locations	South Africa and New Zealand
Activities	Volunteering on wildlife conservation projects and independent travel



Why did you want to do a gap experience?

I wanted to increase self-confidence and do something that would be worthwhile to me but also make a difference to others.

What you did on your gap experience?

I travelled to South Africa for three months. I spent two months on three volunteer projects all orientated around wildlife. Projects included two weeks on an African big 5 wildlife and conservation project, two weeks at a predator sanctuary project and four weeks on an elephant project. I got involved with daily tasks such as cleaning enclosures, planting trees and cheetah tracking. I returned home to apply to university and plan the second part of my gap experience. With a love for the physical aspects of geography and outdoor activities I travelled independently and stayed with family friends in New Zealand for three and a half months.

What did you find easy and more challenging?

The most challenging aspects were that of coming home, back into everyday life in the UK. Whilst travelling in South Africa there are major differences between the UK and other countries and so it can take time to adjust. The easiest aspects of this experience were making the most of everyday whilst I travelled.



What impact has your gap experience had?

Having spent time thinking about what has been the biggest impact from this experience, it has been the continual smile I have every time I talk about my experience, I think a smile says an endless amount, I have gained confidence, belief and self-motivation and have realised that the impossible is possible.

Highlight of your gap experience

One of the highlights of my gap experience was who I met in South Africa, I arrived and felt part of a team and a family it really was an unforgettable experience. The highlight in New Zealand was a four day walk (Keplar Track) through dense rainforest, alongside rivers, up incredible mountains and alongside a mirrored lake.



What did you learn?

In Africa I put my knowledge of field work into practice assisting with the newly started research projects. I learnt aspects of team work and my knowledge of wildlife dramatically increased. Working with guides from all over Africa meant communication was a vital skill. My geographical knowledge increased as I kept a travel blog; researching each place I had visited to share my experience effectively. Keeping a blog and a personal diary also improved my writing skills.

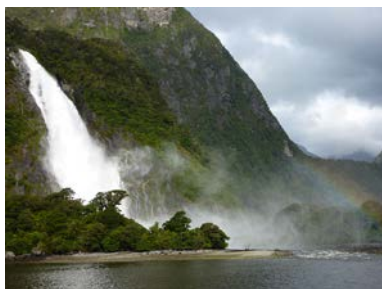
Were there any unexpected outcomes?

Not only did I find a new liking for travel writing I found a new love for photography and hope to continue both new found skills into my future career path.



What are you intending to do as result of this gap experience?

Since leaving Africa I have now become a virtual volunteer from home for Edge of Africa along with the projects welcoming me back at any time. In the long term they have a 6 month expedition in 2015 travelling from Cape Town to Cairo working in individual countries. Previous volunteers have been invited to show interest; therefore I have set this as my long term goal after the completion of university.



What do you plan to do next?

Study Environmental Science and Outdoor Education, combining my love for environmental issues with my passion for the outdoors and motivation to educate others in the future. I will hopefully follow this as a career and return to work in South Africa.

What do you wish you had known before your gap experience?

I wish I had known just how much I would fall in love with South Africa and New Zealand before I departed as I would have happily stayed in both for longer.



What is your advice for anyone thinking of taking a gap experience?

1. Keep a travel blog and journal, it's the little things you can forget but writing it down is an wonderful way to have the experience with you as years go by.
2. Grasp every single opportunity thrown at you from the smallest of things to all those added extras.
3. Finally take photo's every step of the way as they make for a beautiful story once you return home.